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ABSTRACT

The case study presented in this paper illustrates how the succession process for principals is similar to that described by Gabarro in his study of corporate succession. Leader succession involves five major stages: (1) taking hold; (2) immersion; (3) reshaping; (4) consolidation; and (5) refinement. Success most frequently occurs in conjunction with three effective behaviors on the part of the successors. Successful new managers are effective at: (1) assessing the organization and diagnosing its problems; (2) building a management team focused on a set of shared expectations; and (3) bringing about timely changes that address organizational problems. The paper illustrates how leadership and its power and importance during growth, change, and crisis fit into the five stages by describing a case study of principal succession at a middle school in Southern California. Data were collected through interviews of two district-level administrative employees, two site-level administrative employees, one site-level counselor, eight certificated employees, and four classified employees. Information was also taken from journal entries, observations, and document analysis of faculty meeting minutes, memos to staff, a statement of mutual expectations and educational leadership, and a strategic plan. The text describes the principal's background and the conditions under which he assumed the principalship. It narrates the principal's philosophy of dialogue, how he took control, the steps that went into formulating the action plan for the school, and statements from staff members regarding the school's transformation. The case study illustrates the impact that a single leader with a vision can, through stages, have upon the future of a school. (RJM)

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A CHANGE OF ADMINISTRATION:
A SIGNIFICANT ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE EVENT

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Administrative, or leader, succession refers to the replacement of key officials in formal organizations. Miklos (1988, p. 63) (as cited in Hart, 1993), said of its importance: "An assumption underlying the research on administrative succession is that a change of administrators is a significant event in the history of an organization." Succession has been a subject of much interest to researchers in many disciplines, with the emphasis throughout varying methodologies being that when a person holding an influential office in a formal organization is replaced, the effects reverberate throughout the organization.

Acknowledging the interaction dynamics in succession events, one of the specific methods of exploration of this subject has been through a "stage" framework, attempting to synthesize the impacts of leadership, change and culture of the organization across time. Gabarro (1987) described his observations from studies of seventeen general and functional new managers. His goal was to delineate criteria on which one can judge whether or not a succession is complete, examining stages administrators pass through. He concluded that leader succession involves five major stages: 1) taking hold, 2) immersion, 3) reshaping, 4) consolidation, and 5) refinement. Success most frequently occurred in Gabarro's studies in conjunction with three effective behaviors on the part of the successors. Successful new managers were effective at 1) assessing the organization and diagnosing its problems, 2) building a management team focused on a set of shared expectations, and 3) bringing about timely changes that addressed organizational problems. These factors, as defined by Gabarro, will be utilized in framing the case study of a principalship at a middle school. In addition, this author believes that the singular issue of leadership and its power and importance during growth, change and crisis fits into the conceptualization of this principal succession. Weiner & Mahoney (1981), Lieberman

and O'Connor (1972), Day & Lord, (1988) and Smith, Carson & Alexander (1984) also continue to present a compelling case that individual leaders make a difference. Thus, this study will examine the Stages of Leadership Succession with an eye on the factors leading to success as determined by leadership behaviors and defined through a stage framework (Gabarro) and the context of the organization.

METHODOLOGY

The institutional background information that will be explored in the interest of this case study will consist of a case of principal succession in a middle school in Southern California. This case study will be limited to the singular case of succession at a school located in the O.S.D District in a middle school of approximately 1,000 students which serves the children of the cities of Mair and Oto.

Key informants interviewed in this project included:

1. Two district level administrative employees.
2. Two site level administrative employees.
3. One site level counselor.
4. Eight certificated employees (teachers).
5. Four classified employees.

All of the above described employees will remain anonymous for confidential purposes.

The data sources included interviews, journal entries, observation and document analysis. Among the documents reviewed, faculty meeting minutes, memos to staff, the principal's vita, the principal's professional evaluation portfolio, a statement of mutual expectations and educational leadership, and The Strategic

Plan itself were the most significant. Additional data sources were researcher notes and observation from a day-long strategic planning meeting at the school site.

Case Study

Mike is currently a 43 year old principal at a middle school in O.S. D. District in Southern California. He is a husband and a father who stresses the importance of family. He comes to this position after having served within the district at the elementary level in the positions of acting principal and assistant principal. At the middle school level he additionally served as interim principal, assistant principal, teacher, and department coordinator. These positions encompass his eight year tenure in his current district. Previous to this he served as a principal and director of instruction in a K-12 private school in Tegucigalpa, Honduras and a rector and instructor at Instituto Biblico Cuadrangular in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. Additional training in counseling was also part of his background. His educational background consists of an Ed.D. in Educational Administration, an M.A in T.E.S.O.L., an M.Ed. in School Administration and a Bachelors in Religious Education. His case is a unique one of a hard-working administrator that moved to this position after having served as an administrator in the above-named capacities. While much of his educational background is consistent with most school administrators, his religious background and degree bring certain philosophies to his approach to leadership.

Mike began his tenure as principal at his current middle school (D.A.) in February of 1996, as the previous principal and approximately one third of the staff were preparing to depart. The previous principal had been engaged in preparing a new middle school in the

district for opening, and chose a number of the staff to accompany him to the new site (the principal left in February, and took with him his leadership team and the other staff members joined him in August for the opening of the school). Mike was given two weeks by the district to transition, in the middle of the year, (February) from a vice principal of two elementary schools to the principal of a middle school. He went through a number of steps to insure his leadership position during this transition period. He did speak with the out-going principal. During their talks, they covered major areas of responsibility. One area that the out-going principal emphasized during his tenure was budget. Specific amounts were generally allocated to departments, with large amounts occasionally being marked for specific projects, that were then taken through the School Site Council for approval. During this period of time Mike also met with the staff at his new middle school and said of their decision processes to stay or move to the new school, "If you need to go -- God bless you --go, and If you want to stay -- God bless you -- stay." He wanted to communicate to the faculty that he felt they were professionals and respected their judgment. After ascertaining what staff was needed, he set about interviewing for position openings.

One faculty member stated:

He spent a great deal of time getting to know the staff and it was an unusual time because the school was being split with the new school being opened, and a good deal of the staff was going with the previous principal to the new school. Mike had an opportunity to observe the planning process that was going on for the new school as well. The Real Key though, for developing a new feeling for a new D.A. was the core of the existing staff and the new staff that was going to be coming aboard for the new 6th grade. This new positive feeling for a new D. A. by all the faculty and staff was developed through the strategic planning process.

Gabarro (1987), in his stage framework, described the stage of "taking hold". This author believes that the succession of Mike as the new principal began to "take hold" as he met with the staff, taking hold of and grasping the new situation, but engaging in continual sense

making because of the reflection and staff involvement that took place during this time. This, as Gabarro describes it, is a period of "concrete experience and active experimentation". (As cited in Hart, 1993, p. 59).

Mike next came to the faculty and staff expressing a philosophy of dialogue rather than discussion -- allowing synergy to occur, a philosophy borrowed from Peter Senge in The Fifth Discipline. Senge differentiates the terms in The Fifth Discipline (1990), stating:

In team learning, discussion is the necessary counterpart of dialogue. In a discussion, different views are presented and defended, and this may provide a useful analysis of the whole situation. In dialogue, different views are presented as a means towards discovering a new view. In a discussion, decisions are made. In a dialogue, complex issues are explored. When a team must reach agreement and decision must be taken, some discussion is needed. On the basis of a commonly agreed analysis, alternative views need to be weighed and a preferred view selected (which may be one of the original alternatives or a new view that emerges from the discussion). When they are productive, discussions converge on a conclusion or course of action. On the other hand, dialogues are diverging; they do not seek agreement, but a richer grasp of complex issues. Both dialogue and discussion can lead to new courses of action; but actions are often the focus of discussion, whereas new actions emerge as a by-product of dialogue. A unique relationship develops among team members who enter into dialogue regularly. They develop a deep trust that cannot help but carry over into discussions (p. 247).

Incorporating this philosophy into the body of all meetings of faculty and staff, the principal continually came to the group asking, "What do you think?" The task was for the faculty and staff of the school to determine what they wanted the school to look like, and the vehicle was a strategic plan. The district, the previous year, had set a focus for its schools through a mission statement and strategic plan, but this middle school was the first in the district to go through the process. Committees were formed and there was an open forum that was carried out in each and every staff meeting. These meetings moved the faculty and staff of the school from the "taking hold" stage, attempting to grapple with the new responsibilities upon them, to the stage of "immersion". These forums were a departure from any previous involvement of faculty and

staff at this school and represented a beginning change in the decision-making process of the school itself.

A faculty member explained the "happening" in this way, "This is where Mike really took a leadership role and really established himself as a leader and also helped craft a new vision for the school through new objectives and strategies."

The issue of leadership behaviors during a change process may be emphasized at this juncture. As the new vision for the staff was set, Gabarro (As cited in Hart, 1993 , p. 78), would have applauded the leadership behavior. He stated, "decisive change may be the more important behavior [speaking of leadership behaviors], as the new manager may lose credibility if he appears indecisive." Change-centered behaviors in leaders have received much attention in succession research. In all of Gabarro's seventeen cases, the greatest period of change followed deep immersion in the organization. Mike's "vision" provided a guide for this immersion to occur through his leadership behaviors.

Weiner and Mahoney (1981) [As cited in Hart, 1993, p. 53], argued also that the role of the leader may be most important during growth, change and crisis. This case study of principal succession affirms that stated importance. The principal in this case study "took hold" and provided the vision to lead the group to change.

One might actually add that the stages of "taking hold" and "immersion" were linked, as reflection and a need to understand occurred at each sitting of the faculty. This philosophy of communication was found in a Greek word that Mike held up as a guide --- one that means to "extend the Cloth". By this, he referred to the cloth that tailors of this time used that had no hidden folds. As he was called to a meeting by the staff, and asked to explain his style, he stated,

"I extend the cloth" (nothing is hidden), and proceeded, "you as a faculty have more collective wisdom than I could possess." "I believe in you as a people and the collaborative process that will ensue."

Gabarro has indicated that the first of three effective behaviors of leaders in a succession is that of assessing the organization and diagnosing its problems. Mike did this as he set about with collaborative planning for the school as a family. He called himself a cheerleader. The symbol given to each of the faculty and staff was a compass. Each faculty and staff member today has that compass. He said, "Today, I accept my charge. I am the guardian of the vision. It is your job to correct me if I start to veer. We will do anything that is necessary." The assessment was the charge of the leader, but the main task was given to each of the faculty members through empowerment. He was, "honoring the people who were doing the work, treating them as professionals." He told the staff that they had the "knowledge, skills, and understanding to accomplish this task".

A quote from a new faculty member assessed the situation as:

Attitudes and the tenor of first meeting were very positive. This was attributed to Mike, I think the world of him. The only problem is that he tries so hard to please everybody and that is not always possible. He wants the school to be completely unified and he works really hard at that. He is very interested in our opinions and our input - it is a great pleasure to work with him -- we are human beings.

A faculty commentary stated of "professional touches" that the new principal brought to the staff:

Bringing in food, changing the location of the staff room and lunch room, making them both functional places where we would want to be, changing the staff meeting to site management meetings, decorating the restrooms with flowers and wall paper. In staff meetings he wanted everybody to VOTE on everything that happened because people

were complaining about no communication. Initially, there were just too many things to vote on and it took too long. People will complain no matter what. He pushed us hard, but he treated us like professionals and you simply cannot tell Mike no -- you can't -- never. The reason for this is that he leads by example -- you feel guilty if you say you won't do it. He is already doing so much and he makes a project sound just like a little thing. He does have Charisma. We don't mind doing so much because we know that he wouldn't ask us to do it if it wasn't for the good of the kids and the school.

Mike projected his belief in the professionalism of the staff through some small changes, as well as some overarching ones. Some steps that were taken in this interest were: 1) He changed the physical space of the school. (He gave the faculty and staff a lunch room and a work room, sacrificing a classroom to the effort. He also endeavored to make even areas such as the restrooms more pleasant) 2) All faculty were given printed business cards. 3) All faculty and staff were given specific mailboxes (previously secretaries and aides shared a mailbox with instructors. 4) Titles of meetings were changed to reflect the more professional involvement of all faculty members in the school. (Staff meetings changed to Site Management Meetings). 5) As a part of empowering the faculty and staff, budgetary issues were open for discussion at will - there was in general, a feeling that nothing was being held back and that the entire school, cooperatively, had one "mission". 6) He empowered people by letting groups have a concession on everything. Every staff and faculty member was on a committee of some sort. The faculty and staff were led to change and growth, and the singular vision of the leader here began to be of immense importance in the eyes of the each of its members.

The second stage of "immersion" involved much reflection and abstract conceptualization of the nature of the organization through the strategic plan. It provided the opportunity to learn from the actions of the previous stage. During the first month of Mike's succession, an attempt was made at a first strategic plan, but it was seen that reshaping could not take place as Gabarro would describe it until the membership of the school fully believed in the process and grappled

with it. The next, and successful attempt involved a two day strategic planning meeting with key staff members, members of the community, and key teachers from a feeder school that was going to send the 6th graders to D. A. for the 1996-97 school year. During an interview, a faculty member commented, "Through that process and the follow-up too with the action planning team, a culmination in June allowed the New Staff to come together and really feel a part of the new team." This retreat provided for a "jolting" of habits, attitudes and behaviors to accommodate the change through a commitment to a new direction. Objectives, parameters and strategies for the coming year were defined during this time. A commitment to the community and their involvement in the process of the education of the children, a commitment to technology, and a global application of learning was dedicated through four of the resultant strategies:

We will define a governance and communication system which incorporates all parts of the learning community.

We will directly involve parents in their children's education by establishing and implementing a comprehensive plan that connects the parents and the community to the school.

We will develop and implement a site plan to generate access and use of multiple technologies.

We will form partnerships and network with the local and global community to provide students with multiple applications to connect their learning to their lives.

In response to the development of the Educational Objectives and Strategies, additional staff development days were used to form Action Plan Teams. All staff members - classified and certificated - who were to be implementing the strategies during the 1996-1997 school year as well as representative community members participated in the creation of the action plans. A total of 14 Action Plans were created and incorporated in the site plan (Appendix D).

The Action Plan summary for first named strategy (defining a governance and communication system which incorporates all parts of the learning community) involved designing a multilevel governance structure which included: certificated, classified and management employees as well as the representative community members. Prep team members were groups integrated by all staff members who met on a weekly basis regarding policies and procedures. The Action Team was made up of representatives from the Prep Teams who discussed and made recommendations and served as multiple communication sources to Prep Team Members and Site Management Meetings. Site Management Meetings involved all members in the decision-making process through consensus regarding on-hand issues, and made recommendations to the School Site Council (legally constituted group integrated by six site members and six community members which received all reports, approved budgets and programs, and made recommendation to the Board of Trustees). Formal communication sources (handbooks, Cougar Learning Record, Newsletters, etc.) were to be revised to provide on-going communication with students, staff, parents and community members.

The Action Plan for the second strategy (directly involving parents) involved designing delivering a needs assessment and parent orientation, providing inservice opportunities for community and staff members to extend knowledge and implementation of parent involvement structures and strategies, developing and maintaining a parent information resource center, and designing and implementing a comprehensive parent recognition plan.

The Action Plan for Strategy Three (Technology) stated that departments would address the need for independent software acquisitions to meet the needs of the programs, that a word processing lab for students in language classes would be created, along with a computer lab to

better meet the needs of all of the students. The summary also involved obtaining two internet connections on the school site, providing teachers with information and inservice appropriate for and aligned with the site's equipment, and acquiring additional technologies for the school site, replacing and updating equipment as needed.

The fourth and final Action Plan summary indicated a desire to create opportunities for students and staff to connect with people within the fields of education, civil service, small business, large corporations, and other community resources, and to initiate partnerships with the local community on student identified focus areas to promote understanding.

Each of the designated action plans for the 1996-97 school year was accompanied by steps, or stages, and benefits and costs of each measure that had been previously discussed by faculty and staff and voted upon for implementation. These planning sessions created a focus for the faculty and staff and a singular vision that was grounded through discussion and dialogue.

That "singular focus" relates to a second behavioral indicant of success in a succession (Gabarro, 1987) of "building a management team focused on shared expectations". A "focused team" as described by Gabarro, was taking place through the open dialogue and collaboration. The difference here was that the "team" was the entire faculty; this was the management team that was directly focused on shared expectations. Interviews continually produced the word "mission" and "family" when speaking of the "process" and its "founder". Faculty and staff stated that they felt "like a family", empowered to a task, with a philosophy backing them directly from Phillip Schlechty, (as quoted by their principal), "Schools cannot make children successful, but schools can create an opportunity structure where children will succeed."

There were, as in any change process, a few "hold outs" on the faculty and staff that

might be defined as the "Old Guard" of the school. They had seen many principals come and go, and wanted things to remain the same. Two particular incidents discovered through interview changed that philosophy totally and brought them into the "fold" of the family. One faculty member described a very upsetting incident during the last trimester when she was given a class by the outgoing principal that she did not have the adequate background to teach (in her words). She was extremely upset, and brought the issue in anger and tears to Mike. His response was to tell her that she did not have to return to that particular class and he taught it for the entire trimester, before having it changed in the schedule the following trimester. The instructor returned voluntarily to the room and observed the principal teaching the class and learned from his techniques. This faculty member is now one of his greatest advocates. She simply could not believe that a principal would do this "for" her. This example reveals the seriousness of the commitment of the leader to the change that was being undertaken in the school.

Another staff member described a time when there was a crisis in his own family and Mike supported him, stating that family was first, and allowed him to spend time with his son and changed his working hours to accommodate this. This caring attitude, combined with leadership led to the following description of the principal:

The man is wonderful. He has really made a change here. He is on a mission and we are all accepting that and going forward with him and we are making progress here. The man is supporting me and encouraging my professional involvement. Mike takes the family issue as one of importance. The staff and everybody else is a family. It starts with the foundation; he laid out a good foundations. It gives us something to build on. We have a lot of good things going on here.

These statements are also in support of fundamental values as expressed through the leadership.

Finally, another faculty member stated,

There was resistance to some of the change from the "Old Guard" because you have a CULTURE that has been here for a long time. Culture is hard to change and philosophy is hard to change, but letting people have input, people who normally don't go to staff meetings, or any other place, started coming because they felt they COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE and that their opinions were appreciated. He said to them, "I appreciate what you're saying and I understand and know where you're coming from and I appreciate your input and I NEED that input from the "Old Guard" too."

With the charge of the leader in hand, the faculty and staff began to "reshape" and "consolidate" (Gabarro, 1987) the organization, accomplishing as a unit the third successful behavioral indicant of a succession, "bringing about the changes that addressed organizational problems." Much learning took part in the group dynamic process of the change and restructuring process, that brought the leader and his faculty and staff in and out of and back into stages identified by Gabarro. One might say there was a continual "checking for understanding" and rethinking the purpose and function of the school, which often led to a looping back to another stage before moving on. Gabarro speaks of the reshaping stage as heavily action oriented -- a period of active experimentation and concrete observation exploiting the more reflective learning that takes place during the immersion stage. Consolidation corresponds to Gabarro's estimation to the entire range of learning during succession, from the concrete experience to the active experimentation by the new manager.

The "reshaping" and "consolidation" of the organization proceeded through the strategic plan. All faculty and staff took part in this process. During the 1996-1997 school year, communication continued, with resultant action plan proposals and specific budgets for the

following year to aid in their implementation. The "Process" brought this middle school that was lacking in communicative outlets to a unit that had a mission. This mission was to have an impact on the philosophical and physical nature of the entire school. As outlined in "Mutual Expectations" (See Appendix C), the principal stated that he would lead the implementation of the Strategic Plan so that "All efforts of D. A. Middle School are focused on the identified objectives and strategies, resources can be allocated in alignment to meet the strategic plan objectives, and we are protected against over-extending and as a result are not effective." The principal's stated performance expectations for the strategic plan were as follows: 1) One aspect of the strategic plan will be presented at each site management meeting; 2) All decisions made by the Action Team Members, School Site Management meeting, or School Site Council will identify the specific objective or strategy being addressed by the decision; 3) Aspects which are not in alignment will be identified; 4) Site budgets will be managed in alignment with the plan's objectives, strategies and action plans; 5) Family and community involvement will be promoted; and 6) Additional support and funding sources to support the objectives, strategies and action plans will be identified and pursued.

A summary statement of the process is cited from "The Professional Evaluation Portfolio":

During the course of the school year adaptations were made in the governance structure. D. A. still has no identified Leadership Team. The purpose of this structure is to allow all staff, classified and certificated members, to take active participation in the decision-making process. A proposal was made to organize standing committees around the strategic plan objectives to make proposals in alignment with the plan. This adaptation was taken through the process and has been extremely effective in allowing more staff input into the program design, structure and implementation which addresses site level need. . . This process allowed staff to be validated and treated as responsible professionals who are able to make good decisions for the well-being of the site.

A movement toward "refinement" (as defined by Gabarro), occurred on May 5 of 1997, which marked the Staff Development Day to be used to review the strategic plan, celebrate the accomplishments of the staff in completing the action plans for the year, and identify and prioritize the new action plans and create the preliminary budget for the 1997-1998 school year. All of these actions represented impacts that this principal succession had, in a short time, upon the school. As usual, food and coffee and juice were available to the staff (this had become a staple at all meetings). All individuals voted on each and every single issue. The overarching theme of the meeting was "a pointed focus of what is right for kids". Mike ended the meeting by saying sincerely to the staff,

Congratulations, in a little over two hours, you showed your thinking and I appreciate all you have done and appreciate all of the committees and their work. When we bring the other issues that will be procedures to you, I think you will enjoy this process. It is wonderful to know that on May 5, 1997 that we have projected into the future for at least one year, if not two years, in what possibly could happen at our school -- And we did it in two hours and ten minutes. I congratulate you and you have affirmed everything I believed about you and the staff. Thank you (Applause).

This case is an illustration of the succession process for principals as being similar to that described by Gabarro in his study of corporate succession. This principal succession validates Gabarro's stages, looking towards the impact of leadership behaviors. It portrays them, however, in a cyclical nature, one that allows for overlap into previous stages for reinterpretation.

With this last meeting, this researcher noted that issues of the principal succession were being "refined" through the impact of one man upon a faculty and the organization itself. As Miklos (1998, p. 63) (As cited in Hart, 1993), stated "An assumption underlying research on administrative succession is that a change of administrators is a significant event in the

history of an organization." This case study illustrates the impact that a single leader with a vision can, through stages, have upon the future of a school.

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